

Socialist Standard

Official journal Socialist Party of Gt Britain and World Socialist Party of Ireland

FEBRUARY 1968 | 6d

BLACK POWER

Politics+Pop, Shipbuilding, Books

SOCIALIST PARTY OF GT. BRITAIN

OBJECT

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GT. BRITAIN holds:

- 1) That Society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
- 2) That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce, and those who produce but do not possess.
- 3) That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
- 4) That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
- 5) That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
- 6) That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
- 7) That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working-class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
- 8) The SOCIALIST PARTY OF GT. BRITAIN, therefore, enters the field of political action, determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

Those agreeing with the above principles and desiring enrolment in the Party should apply for membership form to secretary of nearest branch or at Head Office.



REVIEW



Non!

France's veto on the British approach to the Common Market added a little more to President de Gaulle's reputation.

The cartoonists feverishly added another lump to his nose, another crease to his face, another shadow around his eyes. The leader writers dipped their pens deeper into the vitriol and Wilson virtually wished the General dead, when he said that time was on the side of the British application.

Bogymen are always useful to capitalism's apologists; they are convenient outlets for frustrated nationalism and scapegoats for the unavoidable problems of the system.

In Britain, these apologists often demand that the government follow something like the policies of de Gaulle, who is determined to expand French influence and power.

This is unpopular in Britain only because it runs counter to the present interests of the British ruling class. Since the war they have seriously misjudged the course of events in Europe, first paying lip-service to European unity, then deliberately trying to frustrate the negotiations for that unity, then choosing to keep the trading links with the Commonwealth rather than join the Common Market.

The erosion of British interests in the Commonwealth, and the hope that there were fatter pickings to be had on the Continent, has caused another look at Europe. But the British ruling class still want to have it both ways, to have the EEC fashioned to their design. The French conception of European unity, on the other hand, is one dominated by the interests of French capital.

The fact that the Six are divided over the rejection of the British application shows that even the organisations which are supposed to be based on common interests have their conflicts. If the British government eventually joins, the disputes will continue, over other issues and throwing up other bogymen.

Capitalism is a mass of diverging interests; even its unities are full of conflict.

No Arms for South Africa

Most of the criticism which followed the government's ban on arms sales to South Africa assumed that the decision was almost the single handed work of Harold Wilson.

The Prime Minister was supposed to have been inspired by opposition to racism—in other words, by political principle. This might be more convincing, were it not for the fact that the whole thing blew up at the end of a year which the Labour government had devoted to proving that its political principles do not exist.

The ban will of course make little difference to the South African government, who will obviously get the

arms they need elsewhere; few weapon salesmen can resist a fat contract. But presumably this had little influence on Wilson who must have acted, if not for political principle then for political reasons.

One of these could well have been that the government's record has put a severe strain upon the loyalty of its supporters. Last year was one of unbroken gloom for them, culminating in devaluation, another upward lurch in prices and the promise of an even gloomier 1968.

Then Wilson's policy on Rhodesia is clearly a stagnant failure; no amount of indignant patriotism can expunge the image of the "toothless bulldog".

If the Labour government had been seen openly to be giving support to the South African regime there would have been a further strain on the Labour Party's loyalty and on the government's relations with the new African states.

This settled, Wilson's superior political skill gave him an easy victory over Healey, Callaghan and Brown; he could appear before his party and the world as the unspotted, high principled defender of the brotherhood of man.

The only remaining question is whether Wilson misjudged his members. Over the past three years they have absorbed a tremendous amount of disillusionment, including the government's about-face on immigration control. Who can be sure that arms for South Africa was their sticking point? In a party without principle anything is possible.

Backing Whose Britain

Of course Prince Phillip was heartened by the news that some workers were volunteering to work an extra half-hour a day without pay. He is the figurehead of the British capitalist class and if anyone is going to gain out of this

it will be them.

For the workers it can only be a dead loss—adding to their working day without getting anything for it. For the employers it might be a clear gain—extra work, extra production which they don't pay for.

Cutting dividends makes no difference to this. The level of dividends does not affect the amount of profit made from the exploitation of the workers; to cut dividends simply means that more money stays in the company, to be reinvested, distributed later in dividends or used in some other way the directors decide. Whatever happens, it belongs to the employers.

The Prince said that extra work for nothing would soon lick all our problems. But whatever the level of pay, whatever the length of the working day, the working class have always suffered the problems of poverty.

The employers' problems, too, have always been there. Well-publicised, gimmicky campaigns will do nothing to help them. Apart from anything else, however hard the workers work the things they make cannot be sold without a market. The employers have no control over this; that is why firms go broke and why workers often find themselves out of a job.

Perhaps the few typists who started it all—although others before them had done the same thing, but without such a clever and well-managed publicity drive—did so from the best of motives. Perhaps they thought they were making a sacrifice for the common good—a reasonable enough incentive.

The tragic fact is that they are misled. They have no Britain to back; to think that they have a common interest with their masters is to fasten their chains more securely upon themselves.

If the representatives of the privileged class are heartened by this it is only because it must keep them more secure in their social and economic superiority.

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SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The Executive Committee meets every Tuesday at the SPGB Head Office, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 at 7.30 pm.

Orders for Literature should be sent to the Literature Department at the above address.

Correspondence for the Executive Committee should be sent to the General Secretary, SPGB, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 Tel. 01-622 3811.

Letters containing Postal Orders etc. should be sent

to E. LAKE, SPGB, at the above address. Postal orders and cheques should be crossed and made payable to the SPGB.

Articles, correspondence, notices of meetings, etc., for the "Socialist Standard" should be sent to the Socialist Standard Production Committee, 52 Clapham High St., London, SW4.

WORLD SOCIALIST PARTY OF IRELAND

The Executive Committee meets 4th Sunday of each month at the Head Office, 5 Granville Buildings, 53 High Street, Belfast 1, at 3.30 pm.

IN THIS ISSUE

About Ourselves	24
Old Harmony	25
Black Power in the United States	26
Let them eat Cake	27
Shipbuilding Industry	28
Politics of Pop	30
Children of France	31
A Quack's Confession	32
Truth at the TUC	32
Patrick Pearse	33
What's Right and Wrong	34
Branch and Group Directory	35

About Ourselves

The Socialist Party of Gt. Britain is an independent party set up in 1904. We are opposed to all other parties in this country including the Labour Party and the so-called Communist Party. Our only links are with similar Socialist parties in other countries.

Our object is Socialism: a world wide society where production will be solely for use, not sale or profit; where the means of life will be commonly owned and democratically controlled; where classes will have been abolished and all human beings be social equals. Production and distribution will be organised on the principle: from each according to his ability, to each according to his need. There will be no buying and selling, no money, wages, profits or banks. All will have free access to what they need to live and enjoy life. As all will have the same common social interests there will be no need for a public power of coercion. The state, armed forces and weapons of destruction will disappear.

This is Socialism. Obviously it does not exist anywhere in the world, not in Russia, nor China, nor Yugoslavia, nor Cuba. What exists in these places is a class society best called *state capitalism*.

We are a Marxist party, that is, we accept the materialist conception of history, the labour theory of value and theory of the class struggle. In our view Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, Mao Tse-Tung, Castro and the others have twisted Marx's views to back their state capitalist regimes.

Present-day society, capitalism, is a class society. The means of production belong not to society as a whole, but only to a section of it, the capitalists. The rest of us have to work for them to live. There are thus two classes in society—capitalists and workers. The working class is not confined to factory workers but includes all who have to sell their mental and physical energies to live; clerks, civil servants, technicians and managers as well.

Built into capitalism is a conflict between these two classes—the class struggle. This struggle over the division of wealth (which is produced by the working class alone) goes on all the time. You are familiar with its forms: strikes, trade unions, employers associations, wage freezes, States of Emergency. This means that the working class is an exploited class. By this we do not mean that workers are treated brutally by bullying employers or that foremen walk about with whips. We just mean that although the workers produce all wealth, the best goes to the capitalists who live off rent, interest and profit. How workers live is rationed by the size of their wage packet or salary cheque. Generally this is not more than enough to keep a man and his family in efficient working order. Despite a world capable of providing plenty for all, workers have to put up with the cheap and second-rate in food, clothes, houses, entertainment, health and so on. We say this is how it must

be under capitalism. These social problems are built into capitalism and will not go till the means of production cease to be the monopoly of a privileged class and become the common property of the whole community. Capitalism cannot be made to work in the interests of all. It can work only one way, as a profit-making system in the interest of those who live off profits.

A feature of present-day society that cannot be ignored is the government machine or state—the public power of coercion. It is used today mainly to protect the property of the property-owners. The owners of the places where you work do not own them in the same way as they own their toothbrushes; they are not their personal possessions. What they have is a legal title, a piece of paper saying that they are theirs. This title is backed by the law.

Thus before the community can take over industry and run it in the interests of all, the working class must capture political power and, by using the state machinery, strip the capitalist class of their property. The means are already to hand in the vote and the ballot box. Elections are about who shall control the state. At present because people do not want Socialism or think it will not work they send to parliament and the local councils members pledged to keep capitalism going. When they want Socialism, then they will elect socialists. This is an important principle: there can be no Socialism without a socialist majority. Socialism can only be introduced democratically by people who want and understand it and are prepared to take the steps needed to get it and keep it going. The only people who can change society from capitalism to Socialism are you, the working class. Nobody, no leaders no MP's, can do it for you. If you want Socialism, it is something you must get for yourselves. This is where the Socialist Party differs from the Labour Party and the so called Community Party. Labour says that MP's by putting through reform measures can bring Socialism for you. The Communists say that a minority, the vanguard party can do the same. We reject both propositions—and the failure of both parties to further the cause of Socialism, let alone establish it, confirms our case. Capitalism has changed Labour, not Labour capitalism, and they have state capitalism not Socialism in Russia.

The Socialist Party stands for democratic, political action to get Socialism. We go further and say that the task of a Socialist party today should be to put the socialist alternative to the working class, and not to get involved in the running of capitalism. We only seek support on the basis of Socialism. We have no reform programme. When we contest elections we do so on a socialist programme and nothing else. This is not because we are opposed to social reforms, but because we are opposed to a policy of reformism. Trying to reform capitalism is pointless; it is like going up a downward moving escalator: you run fast

to stay still. No sooner have you put through one reform than another is necessary.

We reject this futile task and set ourselves a worthwhile one: to help in the slow growth of socialist understanding. For this we are organised as a political party. We bring out this monthly journal, the *SOCIALIST STANDARD*. We publish pamphlets and leaflets. We hold meetings,

indoor and outdoor. We contest elections. We do this because we know that Socialism will not be achieved until a majority want it. There is no other way. There are no short cuts to Socialism.

So we are asking you to study our case and if you agree with us to join our party and so play your part in the struggle for Socialism.

Old Harmony

The story of the Kibbutzim the golden egg of that peculiar version of Social Democracy in Israel, Mapam, (though all the major parties run a few settlements all on fairly exclusive lines, politically), seems only too reminiscent of the utopian ideals of early 19th Century Europe. Substitute the name Ber Borochov for Owen or Fourier and we get surprisingly near to the misguided adventurers of those days.

At a time when the rising European bourgeoisie was still battling to break its feudal fetters, and when the proletariat was still in its early formative years, it is understandable that here and there socialist ideals, lacking the materials basis for their implementation, should find expression in the attempted establishment of utopian communities. In the modern world however, where technology and the forces of production have been raised to an unprecedented level, the notion that isolated communities can be established unaffected by the anarchic and alienating conditions of capitalism is completely unrealistic.

The Kibbutz provides, it is true, a living example of the practicability of the socialist demand for a society in which each shall give according to his ability. The problem of the "lazyman" is almost non-existent, but this was true also of the communities established in America some 160 years ago. (Charles Nardoff in his *Communitic Societies of United States* wrote in 1874 that "the lazy men who are the budbears of speculative communists are not so far as I have heard to be found in the existing communes") The experiment has been performed and in this direction proved successful, now is the time to progress. We must move away from this variation of the 'opt out' illusion and consciously pursue the class struggle to a successful conclusion. This means building up international class solidarity without the provision of illusory escapes into the little world of the Kibbutz.

The fact is that the kibbutzim, like its earlier models in the New World, have merely paved the way for class-divided capitalism. The pioneers regarded these communal farms as the pattern of a future nation, but those remaining have seen instead the growth of a way of life which is the very antithesis of what they stood for. In the United States those communities were invaluable in developing the previously uncultivated areas of the West, and in doing the hard and exhausting work necessary in the opening up of the country for others to exploit. They extended the boundaries of 'civilisation' and vastly increased the value of surrounding land. Precisely the same purpose has been served by the kibbutzim of Israel, though on a more planned and systematised basis. The settlement of the arid and desert zones, and the extension of effective Israeli state control has been their contribution to the increased dominance of capitalism in the Middle East.

In the 19th Century America dozens of these communities went painfully out of existence. Those which remained so

changed in character that they were no longer recognisable as 'experiments in communism', they became experiments in capitalism. The freedom from any lord or master which, for instance, the Rappites so cherished did not it seems extend to the two hundred Chinese workers whom they exploited in their cutlery factory. Similarly the Perfectionists employed some three hundred persons in manufacture, and even went so far as to hire servants. They became just another employer of labour, industrial and agricultural corporations, despite some unusual characteristics. The kibbutz, by definition a small scale enterprise, cannot hope to be self-sufficient. It could never fulfil the fundamental requirement of a Socialist society that each should take according to his need, but even to maintain the modest standard of living which they now have they are required to sell their produce on the capitalist market in exchange for those necessities they are unable to produce. To this end they have entered the field of light industry, producing plastics, crockery, furniture and a host of other goods. Here again, as with their American predecessors, they become hirers of labour. They face all the problems of capitalism in regard to price fluctuations, wages, strikes and, as a capitalist organisation, are not backward in their methods of dealing with them.

The old communities of the United States relied heavily for their continuation on attracting more immigrants and, to a lesser degree, on financial contributions from their country or origin which in many cases was Germany).

Similarly the kibbutz relies for its survival to some extent on the increase of Jewish immigrants encouraged by such organisation as the Mapai-Habonim and the Mapam-Hashomer Hatzair ("the builders" and the "young guardian"), also to contributions from Zionist organisations, and to government and private capital aid. The idealistic kibbutzniks have of course been a very useful adjunct to the Israeli military forces. The Shakers young men joined in Civil war on the side of Unionists, but this was exceptional for such communities. In this respect the kibbutzim have not even reached their predecessors standard. But if and when their use in these respects diminishes the government's benevolence and support will undoubtedly fail.

Persecution in Europe by state and established church authorities has more than once led to emigration and attempts at forming a new and saner society. Some of the qualities achieved may be applauded but it is an unfortunate fact that their desired aims have not been fulfilled. The limited success and abundant failures of the 19th century experiments and those in the 20th century should be a lesson to workers everywhere. The building up of a strong revolutionary Socialist movement on an international scale is the immediate task to be faced.

A member of our companion World Socialist Party of the United States comments on the racial scene there:

Black Power in the United States

The American black power movement is a child of frustration. Thousands of civil rights supporters, having long since absorbed the few sops that capitalism can afford to give them, are running squarely into a sociological brick-wall—a wall they have termed the “white power structure.” Their response, the concept of black power, indicates that they have learned many lessons.

They have learned, for example, that “integration” as such is an empty issue when the integrated population still remains without any basic economic control over their own lives. They have learned that white liberals can do almost nothing for them. And they have learned that the Federal Government is not their friend; in the last analysis, it can never be anything but their implacable enemy. Anti-poverty and civil rights legislation masked for a time the nature of government, but last summer the mask was dropped. The spectacle of thousands of American troops, tanks, trucks, and jeeps being called out to crush rebellions on the part of other Americans, finally and fully revealed what governments exist for: to maintain the power of the ruling class by violent force. And they can never, of their own free will, enact any reform that will interfere with this function.

The black power movement itself is not a monolithic entity. The phrase “black power” means different things to the different groups which espouse it. Moderately interpreted, it means nothing more formidable than the idea that black people must be their own source of liberation; and to achieve liberation, they must cease to rely merely on street marches, and begin to make more extensive use of massive economic boycotts, large-scale rent strikes, black co-operative stores, and black political parties. Behind these proposals is often the feeling that American black people are not “Americans”, in the same sense as white Americans, because they are denied the rights and opportunities which normally attend American citizenship. Radical black power advocates assert instead that they are members of an exploited colonial nation, and their colonial status cannot be changed until they acquire all the ingredients of nationhood: a separate territory, a separate economic unit, and a separate government and culture.

As victims of colonialism, they feel a special kinship with its other victims throughout the world: the Algerians, the Latin Americans, and the Vietnamese. And they are willing, like these other victims, to adopt violent insurrection as a method of separating themselves from their exploiters. American black nationalists, in short, appear to want a kind of North American Israel, a distinct rallying-point that will increase their ethnic dignity.

It is difficult for the Marxist socialist to explain his position to a black nationalist. The socialist rejects capitalist, imperialist, and colonialist ideology, and sympathizes deeply with all of capitalism's victims. It is his outrage at being victimised, in most cases, that originally led him to become a socialist. He recognises, too, that certain sections of the working class take more punishment than other sections, and at the

present time the black worker in America generally suffers more than his white counterpart. This is an obvious fact to anyone who has lived in the U.S. with his eyes open. Yet the socialist, because of what he knows about capitalism, must reject the black power concept as a hopelessly inadequate solution.

The exploitation of black workers is not due primarily to their skin colour, but to their position as wage workers. A prejudiced white is able to discriminate against them because they have no share in the ownership of the means for producing goods. Their real oppression does not consist of taunts like “nigger” and “jigaboo”; if it did, then white people should long ago have been reduced to the same social level by the choice epithets that blacks have invented for them. The facts are that black people, as wage workers, are propertyless, and like other wage workers, they must sell their labour-power for whatever price it will bring. They must sell it even if they have to polish shoes, wash dishes, and pick up cigarette butts after the people who call them niggers and jigaboos. The alternative is to roam the streets of some vast concentration camp like Harlem, still propertyless, and therefore without the power to oppose the constant harassment of the police. The mere fact that someone disliked the colour of a black man's skin would be only a matter of annoyance and pity except for the weapons which the capitalist system places in the hands of his enemies—the threat to lower his wages, take away his job, insult him in the streets, and put him in jail. If capitalism were abolished, these weapons could not exist; nor, ultimately, would the urge to use them.

Private ownership of the means for producing goods divides capitalism into two basic classes: those who live on profit, and those who must sell their ability to work for a wage. This class division cuts across all the others. If the entire working class had precisely the same skin colour in a capitalist system, they would still suffer from the same problems: poverty, unemployment, wage slavery, discrimination, poor housing, inferior education, and conscription. These problems are generated by the system of wage labour and the sale of commodities for profit. Though in some countries they may fall more heavily on a particular ethnic group, they cannot be solved for any part of the working class until they are solved for the working class as a whole.

The black power concept, then, has several serious weaknesses:

As a nationalist ideology, it is anachronistic; it does not fit economic conditions in the U.S. Nationalism is basically a capitalist idea, since its political expression is in terms of territory rather than class. Nationalism may be useful in underdeveloped areas which must industrialise on a capitalist basis quickly; but in the U.S. any form of nationalism can only serve to distract workers from recognising their common plight as members of an exploited class. Because their exploitation is due to their membership in a subject class,

they must free themselves as a class, not as a nationality. To adopt the black nationalist plan and divide the U.S. into competing nations would also weaken the productive power which capitalism in the U.S. has already built. Socialism, on the other hand, requires economic strength and unity in order to make its benefits available to all.

As an insurrectionist slogan, black power is suicidal. Only 15 per cent of the population in the U.S. are black. One needs no great mathematical skill to figure out who would be victorious in a racial war, not to mention the fact that a bottle full of gasoline is a rather inadequate defense against fleets of helicopters and tanks, armed with napalm, poison gas, and fragmentation bombs.

As a revolutionary theory, black power is divisive and self-crippling. Attacks on the "white power structure" mean little unless one understands that the source of its power is not the skin colour of the bureaucrats, but the enormous property values which employ them. We have already mentioned that any part of the working class cannot alone solve problems which stem from their position as wage workers; they must act together with the majority of their class. The concept of black power implies that black workers have basic interests

which conflict with those of white workers. Both black power and white prejudice divide the working class against itself, thereby weakening the class and diminishing the power of each of its members. Black power is not a cure for exploitation, but a symptom of the disease.

Nevertheless, it is possible that black power may also be a healthy sign in the American working class movement. The young insurrectionists of Detroit, Newark, Boston, Cincinnati, do belong to the urban working class, and this is the first time since the 1930s that masses of American workers have broken with "their" government and openly defied it to put them down. Some black power leaders also feel the need for greater support among white workers, and stress their goals of better schools and housing will benefit more white than blacks.

Class consciousness takes a long time to develop. One of the signs of its development is a wholesale rejection on the part of workers that a treadmill is their only possible alternative in life. The black powerists, the hippies, and the peace movement suggest that large things are happening in America which the socialist need not regret.

STAN BLAKE

POLAND

Let them eat Cake

In their *Open Letter to the Party* (see the SOCIALIST STANDARD, December 1967) Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski analysed the living conditions of workers in "communist" Poland. Using official, Polish-government data they produced a devastating criticism of the state capitalist system in that country. One passage in particular stands out in my mind—that dealing with meat consumption in working class families.

Polish food physiologists established 4 norms for meat consumption. Norm A, hardly adequate and not recommended for a long period, requires a monthly per capita average of 3.7 Kg. Norm B, adequate and permitting a normal functioning of the organism over a long period, requires 4 Kg. The data on family budgets reveals that in about 23 per cent of working class families the consumption of meat and meat products is below the hardly adequate norm, and in 18 to 19 per cent of such families, it is within the hardly adequate norm but still below the adequate norm.

According to a research project conducted at the Warsaw Motorcycle Factory in 1957, 23 per cent of the workers ate meat for dinner once a week or less, and 25 per cent ate it twice a week. One might suppose that data seven years old are no longer true, but in fact consumption of meat and meat products in 1957 was 43.9 kilograms, a level higher than that of 1960 (42.5 kilograms) and not much below that of 1962 (45.8 kilograms).

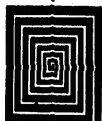
As can be seen, the statistics used by these two imprisoned ex-Communists go no further than 1962. But a recent article in the *Economist* (2.12.67) has presented figures for succeeding years. It shows that the trend in Poland at present is for family incomes to rise. This has resulted not so much from pay increases as from the tendency for more members of the average family to go out to work; thus the labour force has increased by 1,900,000 in the past seven years. As a measure of the poverty of these working class families it is

significant that little of their extra money has been spent on so-called luxuries. Instead they have concentrated on buying more of the basic essentials such as foodstuffs. In fact, food products still account for 47 per cent of total consumer expenditure, the same proportion as before. Due to their new-found "affluence" Polish workers have been eating more meat and it is estimated that in 1967 the average working man just reached the adequate level (norm B). The figure given is 4.3 kilograms/month (52 kilograms/year) for per capita meat consumption, compared to the norm of 4 kilograms/month (48 kilograms/year).

Production in state capitalist Poland, however, is not carried on in order to satisfy the people's needs and the supply of meat products for the market has lagged behind the new demand. This has meant, in classical capitalist manner, rocketing prices of the different types of meat—increases of 16.7 per cent on average, but even higher in some cases (the price of veal, for example, is up by a third). The effect of all this is, of course, quite obvious. It must once more force per capita consumption of meat down below the level which healthy diet demands. The average worker will now only be able to afford 3.7 kilograms of meat each month (44.6 kilograms/year) — the "hardly adequate" norm — if he spends the same money as before on his food. With working class budgets stretched just as tightly in Poland as they are elsewhere, this means he has little alternative than to tighten his belt.

We could not end without mentioning Stefan Jedrychowski, the chairman of the state planning commission. According to the *Economist* he has "blamed the current shortages in meat supplies on the Poles' insatiable appetite for meat"! As always, the barbarities of the capitalist system are only matched by the cynical insolence of those in power.

J.C.



BACKGROUND

THE BRITISH SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY

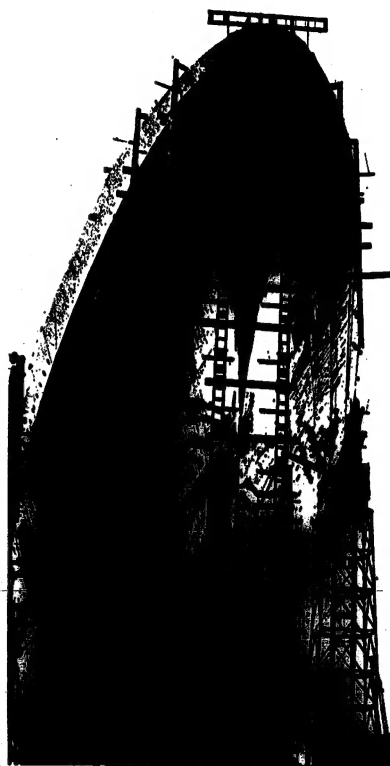
In the British shipbuilding industry, 1968 was greeted with tepid optimism. The optimism was based on the hope that world shipbuilding may at last have recovered from the slump which followed Suez and the conviction that the British industry is about to solve some of its longest standing production problems. But it was kept tepid by the memories of the slump, by the continued presence of uncertainty, and by the low standing of British shipbuilding in the world market. (See Fig. 1).

The slump which started in 1957 was peculiar in that it came at a time of virtually full employment in developed countries and when the volume of world wide sea traffic was increasing. It was caused by the market proving to be smaller than the shipowners, who are only human and who cannot control or predict the anarchies of capitalism, had estimated.

This misjudgement was widespread. Not just the tramp owners but also the big oil companies, the steel firms, even the United Nations, thought there would be more sea-borne traffic than there turned out to be. The reopening of the Suez Canal in 1957 and the cancellation of the contracts for millions of tons of American coal for Europe contributed to the crash. When it came, shipbuilding prices fell by about 40 per cent over some three years and brand new tankers were being taken direct from launching to be laid up, some of them for years.

This typically capitalist mess was put to rights, slowly, not because of any acumen by the shipping men but by the continuing increase in world trade and the scrapping of some of the older ships. The Liberty ships, for example, which flooded out of American shipyards during the war, are now undergoing their sixth special survey—a rigorous examination which may be so costly to pass that it is cheaper to scrap the ship.

For the time being, then, the outlook is slightly better for the shipyards. "We enter 1968 with future commercial prospects brighter than for some years past . . ." said M. A. Scott, President of the Shipbuilders and Repairers National

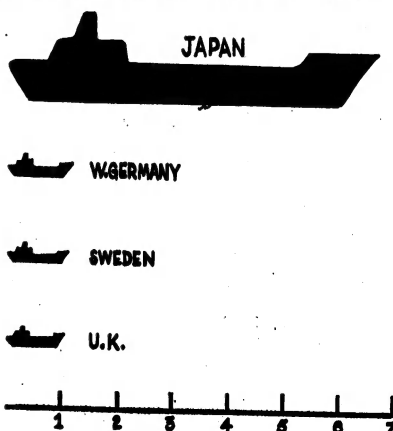


Association (*Times* 1/1/68.) But at best this is a fragile hope.

In 1966 British shipyards were responsible for something like 7½ per cent of world launchings. Fig. 2 shows how the British share of an expanding market is steadily shrinking. What it does not show, however, is the historical scale of this decline—the slide from the days when British shipbuilding dominated the world.

In the 1880's, at the peak, something like 85 per cent of all ships launched in the world were built in Britain. It was

Figure 1. Launchings during 1966 (Million tons gross)



not until the First World War that this share fell below 50 per cent. During the Thirties it fluctuated; after 1945 shot up to about 55 per cent and since then has steadily fallen. (See *Shipbuilding* by A. C. Hardy and E. Tyrrell.)

This decline has not been caused by any reduction in the productive capacity of British yards, which remains at about 1½ million tons, but rather by an increase in the output of other countries which have successfully modernised their yards, applied new techniques and undercut British prices. Hardy and Tyrrell had this to say about the stagnation in Britain:

The present stage is one of transition and, in British yards at any rate, it is likely to continue for perhaps another twenty-five years, because of physical limitations in the shipyard areas on the one hand and of the economic difficulty of scrapping existing and well-tries establishments and valuable equipment on the other.

Foreign competition is the bogymen of British shipbuilding, none of it more frightening than the Japanese. In 1955 Japan

Figure 2.
United Kingdom Launches As Percentage of World Launchings

Year	World Launchings — Tons	U.K. Launchings — Tons	U.K. as % of World
1956	6,670,218	1,383,387	20.74
1960	8,356,444	1,331,491	15.93
1964	10,263,803	1,042,576	10.16
1966	14,307,202	1,160,964	7.58

was producing about half the tonnage of Britain; by 1966 they were making about six times as much. In May 1963, when Court Line ordered a 67,000 ton tanker from Japan, the *Guardian* commented:

This is the first time Court Line has built abroad. It is not the first British flag vessel to be ordered in Japan, but it is certainly rare enough to come as quite a jolt to our shipbuilding industry. (23/5/63.)

Nowadays this event has become more familiar. Even the mighty P & O group, British from stem to stern, has had some of its latest express cargo liners built in Japan and so have Blue Funnel Line and Glen Line. (See Fig. 3.)

The British firms have blamed this onto certain advantages which, they say, their foreign rivals have over them—better credit and loan terms, cheaper steel, a more docile labour force. Whatever the truth of this applied to Japan; it is hardly true of Sweden whose wages and steel prices are high but whose ships are strongly competitive.

This is the situation which gave birth to the Geddes Commission, which investigated British shipbuilding and reported in 1966. As a result the government have introduced the Shipbuilding Industry Bill, under which loans up to £200 million at any one time will be guaranteed for orders placed with British yards. (This was, in fact, higher than the Geddes recommendation). Geddes also came down for a 10 per cent cut in the price of ship steel (negotiations on this should come to a head this Spring) and for a series of mergers among the shipbuilding firms (many of these have already happened, others are now being talked about).

The other issue—probably the thorniest of the lot—may also be settled some time this year. The men who build the ships. Shipyard workers are among the toughest and have a

reputation for prolonged disputes over who-does-what. Their work is hard, dirty and dangerous. Because shipyards, like coalminers, can be built only at certain places, their workers live in concentrated communities near the yard, which makes their unity in disasters, slumps and disputes more solid.

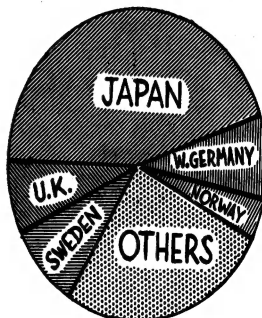
The memories of previous slumps—of Jarrow, of the hulk of the *Queen Elizabeth* rusting above the houses on the Clyde—hang on. The shipworkers' unions have a healthy mistrust of new productive methods which mean more intense exploitation and probably sackings. Their policy has been to sell themselves as dearly as they can, and to fight every inch of the way—even if this meant arguing over who bored a hole or who chalked a line.

The Geddes Commission recommended a reduction in the number of shipyard unions, from about 15 to five, and many changes in conditions of employment, apprenticeship and so on. The unions have already said they are willing to sit down and talk and Dan McGarvey, President of the Boilermakers' Amalgamation, has promised that there will never be another demarcation dispute between shipyard unions.

This, then, is a time of change for British shipbuilding. Geddes hoped that after two or three years of reorganisation the U.K. industry's share of the world market should increase to at least 12½ per cent and production should rise to around 2½ million tons.

But only a year ago, as the Shipbuilding Industry Bill, on which so many hopes are pinned, was published, the Shipbuilding Conference was drawing attention to the fact that "... it would be misleading not to recognise the present weak state of the international freight market." This is something which no amount of reorganisation in shipyards and unions can change; and it could get worse. Peace in Vietnam for example, would probably release a flood of shipping

Figure 3. Share of World Launchings—1966



looking for freight and upsetting many plans for new ships. Also no one is yet certain about the effect which the container ships will have on the number of ships needed on the busier trade routes.

In face of another slump Geddes would be seen for what it is—another desperate stop-gap for one of capitalism's insoluble problems. Capitalism can never tell what is around the next corner; shipbuilding cannot see over the top of the next wave.

IVAN

(Figs 1, 2 and 3 are compiled from figures published in Lloyd's Register of Shipping Annual Summary of Merchant Ships Launched During 1966.)



yesterday

POLITICS OF POP

The Commandments say 'Thou Shalt Not Kill' and half the world is in training to annihilate the other half. Nobody would get me in uniform and off to Aden to kill a lot of people I've never met and have nothing against anyway.

I know people say they are against wars and yet they go on fighting them. Millions of marvellous young men are killed and in five minutes everybody seems to have forgotten all about it. War stems from power-mad politicians and patriots.

Except for the final comment, this could be a socialist speaking in Hyde Park. In fact, it is Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones giving his views on war and militarism. On many other questions his ideas come close to the arguments which socialists use. For example, he is outspokenly anti-religious and opposed to marriage. While he does not appear to relate any of this to the class structure of society, he does at least look upon private property as a curse.

There should be no such thing as private property. Anybody should be able to go where he likes and do what he likes.

Jagger calls himself an anarchist and, like most anarchists, his weak point is his failure to understand how capitalism works. Politicians he claims are "a dead loss" and it is they who are responsible for wars, the legal system and the rest of it.

Politics, like the legal system, is dominated by old men. Old men who are also bugged by religion.

Socialists would reply that it is not the individuals, such as Wilson, who administer capitalism who are to blame but the system of society itself. Nor would we accept that it is the "old men" who have landed the world in its present mess. Even Jagger must recognise that he is in the minority among young people; most youth are just as ardent supporters of private property as their fathers and grandparents. In fact, one has to look no further than some of the other groups

competing on the pop scene to see just how committed they are to capitalism, religious superstitions and all.

Probably the most depressing case is the Beatles. An immensely talented and versatile group, politically they seem to be about as wet as they come. One of them, George Harrison, is convinced, like Jagger, that is the "old men" who are the cause of the world's problems.

I think music is the main interest of the younger people. It doesn't really matter about the older people now because they're finished anyway. There's still going to be years and years of having all these old fools who are governing us and are bombing us and doin' all that because, you know, it's always them.

Confronted by this, Harrison's philosophy is to shut his eyes and pretend it isn't there. He sees an individual way out in meditation. Everything in the material world is superficial, he argues; it is only by burrowing deep inside yourself that you can find god and personal fulfilment.

If you can contact that absolute state you can just tap that amazing source of energy and intelligence. It's there, anyway—you've just got to contact it and then it will make whatever you do easier and better. Everything in life works out better because everybody is happier with themselves.

This might be a comforting creed to someone with Harrison's wealth but unemployed workers in Birmingham or hungry peasants in Bengal are likely to be slightly less impressed by the miraculous powers of meditation. The Beatles, spiritual mentor, the so-called Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, obviously has a shrewd understanding of this and restricts his missionary efforts to the clientele of the London Hilton and such places. The Maharishi, a sort of latter-day Rasputin with mental powers seem to be in inverse proportion to his impressive title, is at least a magnificent showman. Some of his profundities have to be heard to be believed:

I think ladies meditate comparatively more successfully

because the quality of heart is more developed in the ladies than in the men, and therefore the waves of joy are more aroused, and that's why the joy is felt more. The heart is more—a mother's heart is much more-much more wavy—more waves, deeper waves rise in mother's heart than in the father's heart. An experience of bliss does need a more capable instrument of emotion.

People who fall for this sort of rot will obviously be taken in by anything and, like Rasputin, the Maharishi seems to have a low opinion of those who provide him with a comfortable living. Interviewed recently in Bremen (West Germany) he was reported to have laughingly remarked that "no matter where I am people will find in me the commodity that they want."

As well as their hatred of the "old men", Jagger and Harrison have another trait in common—their dislike of oppression. Yet there are plenty of pop singers with other ideas—some openly racist, others advocating dictatorship. P. J. Proby, for example, is fond of making half-witted generalisations about negroes—"They're always asking for handouts. They don't have any real dignity." Another singer with totalitarian sympathies is Scott Walker who, like Harold Wilson, has a passion for telling the working class what is wrong with them. According to Walker we have all gone flabby in the West and we ought to have this knocked out of us by a good dose of Stalinism.

Russians have an unbelievable strength, nothing shakes them. The workers here should have the same opportunities, they should be educated on radio and television. They need a good dose of propaganda and more than anything else they need a form of dictatorship again... then we'd be all right again.

The politics of pop are worth looking at not because pop singers are anybody in particular but because most of them are from the working class and, to a certain extent, their ideas are typical of the lines which young workers think along.

One of the most widespread of their illusions is the feeling that the fundamental division in society is between young and old, rather than between the working class and the propertied class. Prejudices such as this are just as dangerous as racialism because they obscure the fact that the real conflict in society is between classes—not generations. The gulf which separates a young worker from a young capitalist is immeasurably wider than that which exists between two workers of different ages. Whatever superficial differences there might be in styles of dress or tastes in music, working men are united as a class by the fact that each one of us has to sell his labour power to the capitalists. In the same way the capitalist class stand together, whatever generation they might identify themselves with as individuals, because collectively they live off the surplus value which they wring out of the working class. It would be nice to have a few politically conscious pop singers who recognised this but, in the end, it doesn't matter that much. After all it is not a few individuals like George Harrison or Mick Jagger who are going to win the revolution but the millions of working men and women, young and old, who make up the working class.

Let's finish by giving the floor to Jimmy Savile—one of the most successful DJ's in the pop business. Preaching in a church near Halifax just before Christmas he sent up a prayer to capitalism which would have warmed the heart of any Victorian mill owner or steel baron.

For the first few years, I worked down a coal mine. Now I have hit this 'golden seam' and I say, 'Thank you, Lord, business is good.'

For the rest of us, who are still working down the mines, or in the factories and offices, how many of us feel like echoing Jimmy's pious gratitude? The only 'golden seam' we are ever likely to hit is socialism. And that won't be thanks to any gods but just to our own revolutionary initiative.

I.C.

50 YEARS AGO

Children of the French Motherland

(A French patriot had written urging the SPGB to support the war in order that Alsace-Lorraine, annexed to Germany in 1871, should be restored to France.)

This very annexation, now so loudly denounced, was agreed to by the French capitalist class on condition that the French prisoners of war should be released from Germany for the sole purpose of crushing the Commune of Paris. It was the price of the slaughter by French soldiers of 25,000 French working men, women and children in the streets of Paris. No capitalist then wept for the workers; no capitalist love for the 'children' of France saved them from the foul conditions and awful tortures of Salory and other prison camps; no

French capitalist 'chivalry' stood between hapless thousands and death from hunger and privation in savage New Caledonia. Long after the fighting ceased, the farcical 'trials' continued to provide targets for capitalist bullets. In fact, the slaughter was only stopped because of the fear of an epidemic. As the real historian—Lissagary—says, 'It was pestilence, not pity', that stopped the murders.

The French and German capitalist classes joined hands, after a tremendous war between the two countries, to crush down, maim and murder the working class in France. The lesson should be burned deep into the minds of the working class, not of France only, but of the whole world. For it shows the foul hypocrisy of the capitalist class, whether of France or of Germany, of England or of Italy, of Austria, Russia, America, Japan or any other country, when they pretend to be interested in the welfare of the workers of the particular nations they rule, or aspire to rule, while all the

time it is the profit plundered from the workers that is their real concern.

From the SOCIALIST STANDARD
February 1918.

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BOOKS RECEIVED

Critics of Society by T. B. Bottomore
Allen and Unwin, 25s.

A Quack's Confession

The man was certainly ill. We all agreed about that. He was unconscious. He had a high fever. His breathing and pulse-rate were irregular. On rare occasions he would regain consciousness—but then he would just babble nonsensically, or leap about making frantic gestures. Everyone had to admit that there was something wrong. This was not how folk ought to behave. Undoubtedly, he was ill.

Furthermore, we all said something should be done about it. A few advocated prayer, others punishment. But most of us rejected such foolish advice. We were determined to treat his illness properly, medically, and effect his cure.

"The correct treatment is quite apparent," said one. "The patient is unconscious, so we must wake him up. We can do this by shaking him vigorously, and by sounding loud noises in his ear."

"Perfect!" cried another. "And since he has a temperature we must cool him down. Let us submerge his body in icy water."

"Naturally," said a third. "And to regularise his breathing we must connect an air pump to his lungs, and be careful to work it by the clock."

In due course they fixed on a plan by which the sick man would receive all these types of medical care. To their surprise, however, after days of the most intensive treatment the patient did not seem to be improving. I thought his condition had worsened, but my companions indignantly rejected this suggestion, and not a few of them maintained (with deep conviction) that our man was on the mend. "Only a soulless cynic could deny that we have made progress," someone remarked, with a contemptuous glance in my direction.

At this I felt I had to speak out. "My knowledge of medicine is very slight," I told them. "But I do think we've been setting about this problem in the wrong manner. It seems to me that these disorders which you have been treating: the temperature, the irregular pulse and so on—these are but symptoms of something deeper. I think we should discover the cause of the illness and treat *that*."

At this there was, first of all, a great deal of laughter, but when I persisted, amusement turned into annoyance. One of my friends, a little kindlier than the rest, told me: "I can appreciate your

concern. When I was your age I too had these high-flown ideas. However, we've a practical job to do now, and we're doing it as well as we can. These abstract notions of yours may sound all right in theory, but you must remember: *medicine is the science of the possible*."

"The so-called treatment you're using isn't curing the patient," I remonstrated. "If you never tackle the roots of the ailment, he will never recover. You may even be responsible for his death."

"That's going too far," I was rebuked.

"Cherish your own ideals if you want to, but don't cast aspersions on decent people who are doing a necessary job. We're extremely devoted to our medical work, and it makes my blood boil to hear the irresponsible suggestion that it's all in vain. We cannot expect overnight miracles, after all."

Throughout all these conversations, the patient was groaning pitifully, and was therefore ducked in even colder water, shaken yet more roughly, submitted to louder and louder noises, etc. I was infuriated and went off to consult some books on medicine and physiology, where I soon discovered the cause of our patient's infirmity. As a matter of fact it is quite a simple virus, and very easy to eradicate.

But I could never persuade the others

to listen to me, and they came increasingly to think of me as an obstructive person with a dangerous obsession. At length I was becoming such a nuisance that they had me locked up. I have been in this prison cell ever since. I am allowed newspapers, and in all of them I read that the patient is about to recover.

Yesterday I had a visitor—my fiercest opponent, the one who had denounced me more heatedly than anybody else, the one who was most dedicated to the view that only symptoms should be treated. "I'm genuinely sorry to see you here," he said. And I could see that he was.

"This may surprise you, but I personally feel there may be a lot in what you say. I couldn't come out on your side though. All these ideas about viruses are far too much in advance of the thinking of ordinary people. We must educate them gradually. In time, if we keep on treating symptoms, they will come to see that we must eventually eradicate the cause as well. I admire you stand, but we must be realistic, and not move ahead of the times."

With that, and a promise that I would be made more comfortable, he shook me warmly by the hand and left.

All the same, it is extremely lonely here in the cell, and sometimes, at night, I am awakened by the patient's screams of agony.

STEELE

FINANCE AND INDUSTRY

Truth at the TUC

The full report of last September's Trade Union Congress has just been published. We select two items of interest. First, consider this confession of the failure of parliamentary gradualism, Labour's theory, made by Sir Harry Douglass in his Presidential address:

All sophisticated countries have used taxation to achieve a more equal sharing of the wealth produced. In a democracy they have to, or the government would be quickly changed, or even democracy as we understand it would be destroyed. Yet, with all that has been achieved, 5 per cent of the population of Britain still own 75 per cent of the property.

What else does he expect? As long as a few monopolise the means for pro-

ducing wealth, what is produced is bound to be shared unequally between the few who get a property income as rent, interest or profit and the many who get a work income as wage or salary. That is how capitalism works, and must work. But Socialism is nothing to do with "equal sharing of the wealth produced"; it is about the common ownership of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth.

When in August last year the SOCIALIST STANDARD discussed the Means Test we pointed out that some of those in favour were invoking the old socialist phrase: from each according to his ability, to each according to his need. They tried to argue that the Means Test ensured that people got what they





"needed" (as decided by bureaucratic rules concerned with spending as little as possible). We denounced this as an insolent and cynical distortion of the phrase. One delegate, E. Patterson, of the Constructional Engineering Union, made the same point in a debate on social security, so-called. Though he gives the impression that Marx expected social conditions to improve as a result of people becoming more civilised and rational rather than as a result of a social revolution converting the means of life from private to common property, Patterson puts the position well enough:

Finally, in support of selectivity, certain people have had the audacity to use the slogan 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his need' That was real prostitution of a Socialist slogan because that slogan was characterised by Karl Marx in his critique of the Gotha programme as being a possibility in the highest stages of civilisation when the last vestiges of imperialism had gone, when man had become a real rational human being, when man worked for the benefit of the community and for the benefit of his fellow man. When such a thing as a means test was absolutely impossible, then and only then, said Marx, would there be the possibility 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his need'. The use of it by people in favour of selectivity is a prostitution of that statement.

Quite. In the complete Socialist society that Marx envisaged there would be no rationing since in a world of plenty all could have free access to what they needed to live and enjoy life. In 1875 Marx thought that a lengthy transition period between capitalism and complete Socialism would be necessary. He may have been right at the time but now, after nearly a hundred years further development of the forces of production, we say that Socialism, with abundance and free access, could be brought into being in a very short time once the decision to do so was made.

Today, of course, men and women of the working class are rationed and restricted by the size of their wage packet or salary cheque. So the TUC might take note of another Socialist phrase used by Marx. In 1865, three years before the TUC was set up, Marx advised the trade unions to replace the conservative slogan of a 'fair day's wage for a fair day's work' by the revolutionary one of 'abolition of the wages system'.

A.L.B.

Patrick Pearse

The Best of Pearse

edited by Proinsias Mac Aonghusa and Liam O'Reagain, *The Mercier Press, Cork*, 10s.

This book is a collection of the writings of Patrick H. Pearse who was executed by the military representatives of the British ruling class after the collapse of what has come to be known as the Easter Rising, in Dublin in 1916.

Pearse practised at the Bar for a brief period and is reputed to have originated the IRA tactic of refusing to recognise British Courts. Useful though such heroics, and their inevitable tactical offsprings, proved to the British Authorities (and later the N. Ireland and Eire governments) in creating "gaol battalions" of the IRA, it is not for this that Pearse is remembered.

Nor is his claim to fame to be found in his writings as a teacher and educationist (some of which are found in this collection) though, in the latter capacity, he proved capable of observing the perverted purpose of education in the hands of the State—albeit that the "State" for Pearse was the English State and not the state of capitalism.

Pearse's real claim to a place in Irish history was his execution by the British military after the abortive 1916 Rising. Also executed were the six other members of the Provisional Government of the proclaimed Republic, among whom was James Connolly.

Connolly (and the digression is deliberate) was a former member of the British Social Democratic Federation and was prominent in the maelstrom of controversy that shook that organisation immediately after the turn of the century. Out of that controversy was born the first of the Companion Socialist Parties (the Socialist Party of Gt. Britain) and the almost defunct Socialist Labour Party, of which Connolly was a prominent member.

Among "left-wing" organisations in Ireland and similar organisations of Irish emigrants in Britain the name of Connolly is revered as the "Lenin of Irish Socialism". Despite the fact that Irish Capitalism, in the post-Connolly era, did not develop Russia style, the analogy is a good one—insofar as both Lenin and Connolly made effective contributions to the confusion of the working class by overlaying the simple case for Socialism with complex issues

of concern only to the nebulous interests of capitalism in their respective countries. Since Connolly's contribution in this respect was almost exclusively restricted to Ireland, where it is linked with the rabid nationalism of Pearse, we felt that somewhere in these writings we might unscramble the mystery of their association.

Apart from an insipid playlet and some mediocre poetry the collection contains a number of essays, often repetitive, in which Pearse deals with Nationalism, Education, Literature and Freedom. In a style reminiscent of the later 'heroes' of Hitler's National 'Socialism' he declares his faith thus: The Irish political leaders

have conceived of nationality as a material thing whereas it is a spiritual thing. They have made the same mistake that a man would make if he were to forget his immortal soul. They have not recognised in their people the image and likeness of God. Hence the nation to them is not holy... a thing so sacred that it may not be bought in the market places at all or spoken of where men traffic.

Here, as with Connolly, is the failure to recognise that the very thing he edifies, the national state, is the political creature of that system whose effects he vilifies, capitalism. Again, in dealing with Freedom and Education, Pearse proves himself an observant reporter of effects but wholly off-course when it comes to cause. Thus, in *The Murder Machine* he imputes to the "English education system in Ireland" the fact that:

The modern school is a State-controlled institution designed to produce workers for the State.

and he quotes Professor Eoin Mac Neill in comparing the same "English system in Ireland" with "slave education" designed not to make children "strong, proud and valiant, but to be sleek, to be obsequious, to be dexterous... to make them good slaves."

The fact that the "English system of education" in Ireland was the same as it was in England, or anywhere else in the world of capitalism, a system designed to equip working class children for their adult role of wage slaves, was missed as was recognition of the fact that the great majority of "the English" had as little freedom and pros-

perity as their Irish counterparts. That, in fact, the common enemy of the great majority of Englishmen and Irishmen was the system of international capitalism.

As we struggled through this windy prose we were tempted to wonder what was Connolly's reaction to Pearse's naive outpourings and then we remembered that his reaction was to become Pearse's comrade-in-arms.

The Best Of Pearse is artless, ignorant and its presumption to wit, monotonous—except, perhaps, when Pearse feels "sure that political economy was not invented by Adam Smith but by the devil!"

R.M.

What's Right and Wrong

Secularisation And Moral Change

Alasdair MacIntyre, *Oxford University Press*, 12s. 6d.

A Short History of Ethics

Alasdair MacIntyre, *Routledge Paper-back*, 15s.

What's right? What's wrong? At some periods in history these questions called forth firm, confident, even unanimous replies. Today there is a lot of uncertainty about even the most basic moral ideas. These two concise and useful books help us to understand why.

Secularisation And Moral Change begins by quoting Engels' prediction that the working-class, mainly indifferent to religion but still vaguely respecting it, would abandon even the remnants of belief and become solidly atheistic. MacIntyre has no difficulty in backing up his view that this prediction has not yet been fulfilled to any great extent. "The English working-class today is on the whole not strikingly more secularised than it was" when Engels wrote. A great deal of de-Christianising had taken place prior to Engels' observations, and this MacIntyre correctly identifies as due to "the destruction of the older forms of community, in many cases rapidly, and in particular the destruction of those features of them to which religion had given symbolic expression."

The development of capitalism and the cities gave rise in ethical theory to the dominance of the secondary virtues—virtues (like fair play, tolerance,

a gift for compromise) which are only indirectly related to human ends. The view that "moral decline" is a result of Christian decline is false:

It is not the case that men first stopped believing in God and in the authority of the church, and then subsequently started behaving differently. It seems clear that men first of all lost any overall social agreement as to the right ways to live together, and so ceased to be able to make sense of any claims to moral authority. Social change and with it moral change is chronologically prior to the loss of belief effected by intellectual argument, except where a very small minority are concerned.

Today the spread of atheism is inexorable, but much slower (in Britain) than Engels expected. It is significant that the churches have a particular hold on people through christenings, weddings and funerals. Birth, love and death were in former times "explained" by the Church. Today this explanation is like the salt which has lost its savour, but no new system of attitudes and rituals has arisen to replace it. This is not surprising. The atomisation and shattering of community (and the education) which result from capitalism forbid the existence of any widely-accepted and consistent view of the world in terms of human values. Hence, the staying-power of Christianity MacIntyre attributes to the lack of any alternative.

The churches are trapped between introversion and assimilation, between escape and dilution. On the one hand there is what MacIntyre calls "enclave Christianity," which will "provide a retreat from the conditions of urban secular life, and contribute nothing to urban secular life." The other pole is that Christianity itself becomes secularised. Modern religious leaders would love a theology of the secular, but all they have is a secular theology.

And MacIntyre makes short work of milk-and-watery Woolwich-type modernism. He points out that it is meaningful to say "Obey the spirit, not the letter of the law" only when there is a letter of the law. It is pointless to advocate a morality in which rules have been replaced by a principle of intent such as "love", because when denied reference to specific prescribed courses of action, these labels are emptied of meaning. There can be no morality without rules.

MacIntyre argues clearly and rationally, and his analysis is firmly in the Marxist tradition. One grumble: he clings to the myth that there is a modern

middle class. *A Short History of Ethics* is a more comprehensive work: not so much a sketch, more a standard textbook. It gives a fair outline of developments in moral thinking, a clear criticism, plus some very interesting observations on the relationship of morals to social change.

MacIntyre never forgets the historical and social aspects of ethics. Neither does he fall into the opposite trap of some lazy-minded "Marxists," who delight in the unscientific game of finding a one-to-one correspondence between economic events and ideas, or who point out that such-and-such a viewpoint is in the interests of such-and-such a class, and think that this frees them from the need to evaluate that viewpoint logically.

He attacks the view of the field of moral philosophy as "the language of morals" pointing to the untranslatability of the chief moral terms of Ancient Greece. In a harmonious society virtue and happiness are closely linked concepts, but in a society like modern capitalism these concepts are independent, even antagonistic. So we get a division of opinion into those who advocate personal advancement and those who favour moral goodness. "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may" versus "Let justice be done though the heavens crumble."

In England the rise of individualism meant:

That all the links between duty and happiness were gradually broken. The consequence was a redefinition of the moral terms. Happiness is no longer defined in terms of satisfactions which are understood in the light of the criteria governing a form of social life; it is defined in terms of individual psychology. Since such a psychology does not yet exist, it has to be invented. Hence the whole apparatus of appetites, passions, inclinations, principles, which is found in every 18th century moral philosopher.

MacIntyre apparently thinks that lack of consideration of the role of morals in the socialist revolution is a gap in Marx's theory, but he points out:

Marx resembles Hegel and the English idealists in seeing a communal framework as presupposed by morality; unlike them, he sees that it no longer exists; and he proceeds to characterise the whole situation as one in which moralizing can no longer play a genuine role in settling social differences. It can only be an attempt to invoke an authority which no longer exists and to mask the sanctions of social coercion.

Visitors are cordially invited to every Meeting

SPGB Branches

BIRMINGHAM Thursdays 7.30 pm. "Plough & Harrow", Jamaica Row, (Discussions 2nd and 4th Thursdays in month). Correspondence: H. J. Grew, Flat 1, 37 Woodfield Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham 14.

CAMDEN (Bloomsbury). 1st & 3rd Thursdays 6-8 pm, Feb. 1 & 15, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1. Correspondence: SPGB at above address.

DARTFORD 1st and 3rd Fridays in month 8 pm, Feb. 2 at 7 Cyril Road, Bexley-leath and Feb. 16 at 32 Ickleton Road, Mottingham, SE9. Correspondence: W. G. Catt at above latter address.

GLASGOW Every Monday 8 pm, 163a Berkeley Street. Correspondence: A. Donnelly, 29 Southden Road, Glasgow, W.5.

GREENFORD & DISTRICT Fridays 8 pm, Greenford Hall, Greenford Broadway. Correspondence: R. Cain, 35 Waltham Road, Solihull, Middlesex. Tel. 01-574 8584.

HACKNEY 2nd & 4th Wednesdays in month 8 pm, Hackney Trades Hall, Valette St. (off Mare St.) E9. Correspondence: S. Beck, 28 Fetherston Road, Cannonbury, N5.

HARINGEY Fridays 8 pm (Discussion after business). Wood Green Civic Centre, N22. (2 mins. Wood Green Tube). Correspondence: Secretary, 3 Drapers Road, Enfield.

LEWISHAM Mondays 8 pm, Co-op Hall (Room 1) Davenport Road, Rushey Green, Cuxford, SE6. Correspondence: SPGB, Co-op Hall, Davenport Road, SE6.

MID HERTS Regular meetings every Monday 8 pm in the Hatfield, Stevenage and Welwyn Garden City areas. Correspondence: H. Mattingly, 27 Woodstock Road, Broomhouse, Herts.

NEWHAM (West Ham) 2nd and 4th Thursday (Feb. 8 & 22) in months, 8 pm, Orchardbury Road Schools, Manor Park, E12 (Discussions from 9 pm). Correspondence: D. Deutz, 117 Pett's Lane, Romford, Essex.

SOUTHEND 2nd and 4th Thursday (Feb. 8 & 22), 19 Kingswood Chase, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex. Correspondence: H. G. Cottle at above address.

SOUTH WEST LONDON Mondays 8.30 pm, 52 Clapham High Street, SW4. Correspondence: Secretary at this address.

SWANSEA Alternate Mondays (Feb. 12 & 26, 8 pm, Old Red Cow, High Street, Swansea. Correspondence: to Frances Ambridge, Mareng, Brynmwyd, Llansyfelach, Swansea.

WEST LONDON Fridays 8 pm, Westcott Lodge, Lower Mall, Hammersmith (facing river few minutes from Broadway). Correspondence: E. Warnecke, 158 Whitton Avenue East, Greenford, Middx.

WESTMINSTER (Paddington and Marylebone) Wednesday 8.30 pm, Royal Oak, York Street, W1 (near Marylebone Rd.). Correspondence: SPGB, 76 Ladbrooke Grove, W11.

WOOLWICH 2nd and 4th Fridays (Feb. 9 and 23) in month, 7.30 pm, Town Social Club, Mason's Hill, SE18. (Discussions at 8 pm.) Correspondence: H. C. Ramsay, 9 Milne Gardens, Eltham, SE9.

EALING For details: E. Critchfield, 55 Meadvale Road, Ealing, W5.

EDGWARE Enquiries: Anne Waite, 61 Fairfield Crescent, Tel: EDG 3556.

MANCHESTER Enquiries: L. Hopkins, 65 Fog Lane, Didsbury, Manchester 20. Tel. Didsbury 7641. Meets every Thursday at 8 pm. "Wagon & Horses", Bridge Street, Deansgate, Manchester.

SUNDERLAND 1st Sunday in month 8 pm. Wearside Trades Council Social Club, 8 Tavistock Place.

For information

BRENT C. May, 1 Hanover Road, NW10. Tel. 01-459 3437.

BRISTOL Enquiries: J. Flowers, 6 Backfields, Bristol 2. Tel. 46803.

BROMLEY For further information contact I. Robertson. Phone Farnborough (Kent) 51719.

COVENTRY Meetings first Tuesday in month 8 pm, 16 The Triangle, Friarham Way, Allesley Park, Enquiries: Tel. 73864.

EDINBURGH Enquiries: Ian Penman, 5 Meadow Place Road, Edinburgh 12, Tel. COR 3451.

HOUNSLOW Enquiries: J. Thurston, 15 Shirley Drive. Tel: TW1 2357.

HULL Enquiries: D. R. Steele, Southlands, Thwaite Street, Cottingham, E. Yorks.

KIDDERMINSTER Enquiries: H. Whitaker, 14 Elm Road.

KINGS LYNN L. Potts, 5 Sydney Terrace, Saddleford Road, Kings Lynn, Norfolk.

KINGSTON Enquiries: 80 Farm Road, Esher.

MERTON Enquiries: T. Lord, 288 Church Road, Mitcham.

NORWICH Enquiries: B. Blazeby, 68 Orchard Close, Hearease Lane, Norwich, Norfolk.

NOTTINGHAM Enquiries: R. Powe, 13 Westernham Close, Bilborough.

OLDHAM Wednesdays 7.30 pm, 35 Manchester Street. Enquiries: R. Lees at above address. Tel. MAJ 5165.

OXFORD Enquiries: A. Robertson, 52 Henry St., Oxford. Tel. 47302.

PLYMOUTH Enquiries: M. Gill, 41 Lillworth Drive, Roborough, Plymouth.

ROCHESTER All those interested in a discussion group write to L. Cox, D13 Hoo Marina, Rochester, Kent.

SOUTHAMPTON All those interested in forming a discussion group in the Southampton area contact C. B. Chislett, 35 Beech Crescent, Nettley View Estate, Hythe.

TEESIDE Enquiries: R. Kennedy, 19 Thompson Grove, West Hartlepool.

WEST LOTHIAN J. Oldham, 84 Deansfield Road, Bo'ness.

WESTMINSTER L. Cox, 13 Shelley House, Churchill Gdns., SW1. Tel. 01-834 0427.

WALLASEY J. Cardin, 13 Birch Grove, Wallasey, Cheshire.

WSPI Branches

BELFAST Tuesdays 8 pm, 5 Granville Buildings, 53 High Street, Belfast 1.

CENTRAL Details from Secretary, 147 Gilnahirk Road, Belfast 5.

DUBLIN Enquiries: Secretary, 5 Seville Terrace, North Strand, Dublin 1.

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SPGB Groups

BRIGHTON 3rd Friday in month, 18 Nicholas Road. Enquiries: J. Holford, 46 Hatfield Avenue, Hollingbury, Brighton 6.

CAMDEN (Hampstead). Enquiries: Secretary, 40 Lisburne Road, NW3. Tel. (01) 485 3182.

NEW PAMPHLET: RUSSIA 1917-67

Is.

Order your copies now from SPGB, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 (Postage 4d extra)

Meetings

LONDON OUTDOOR MEETINGS

Mondays: Lincoln's Inn Fields 1-2 pm

Thursdays: Tower Hill 1-2 pm

Sundays: Hyde Park 3 pm

CAMDEN GROUP

The Enterprise, Chalk Farm Road,
(opposite The Round House and
Chalk Farm Tube Station—
Buses 24, 31, 45, 68, 187, 239)

12th February 8 p.m.
Crime, Kids and Capitalism

WEST LONDON

Westcott Lodge, The Mall, Hammersmith
Fridays 8 pm

9th February
Rightist Parties
Speaker: D. Hidson

23rd February
We are Backing Socialism
Speaker: R. Guy.

HARINGEY

Civic Centre, Wood Green
Fridays 8 pm

February 2
German Social Democracy
Speaker: D. Sawyer.

February 23rd
Marx and the State
Speaker: M. Harris

March 8th
Development of Capitalism in China
Speaker: K. Knight

HACKNEY

Trades Hall, Valette Street, E8
Wednesdays. 8.30 pm

February 14th
The Co-operative Movement
Speaker: I. McLaughlin

February 28th
Human Rights
Speaker: J. McGuinness

HULL

Weekly discussion group meetings on
Sundays at 8 pm at the Blue Bell,
Lowgate, Hull.

WESTMINSTER

Royal Oak, York Street, W1
(near Marylebone Station)
Wednesdays 9 pm

February 7th
Anarchism
Speakers from Kilburn Anarchist group

February 21st
Socialism and Democracy
Speaker: A. Buick

MID HERTS

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME

October 1967 to May 1968
at Stevenage, Bedwell Community Centre
Mondays 8 pm

19th February
Theories of Value before Marx
19th March
The Labour Theory of Value
22nd April
The Marginal Theory of Value
20th May
Money, Banking and Crises

MANCHESTER

Every Thursday at 8 pm
Waggon and Horses (corner Bridge St. and
Southgate, Deansgate)

MANCHESTER OUTDOOR MEETING

Every Sunday evening at
The Shambles

EDGWARE GROUP

Edgware Library, Hale Lane.
Thursday February 15 at 8.15 pm
The Policy of the Liberal Party
Speaker: Mr. Gerald Cass
(Prospective Liberal Candidate, Hendon N.)

LEWISHAM

Room 1, 2 Davenport Rd. Rushey Green.
Catford, SE6
Mondays 8.15 pm
February 12th
London Government
February 19th
Cannibis and Capitalism

BRIGHTON

Co-op Hall, London Road
How Capitalism runs the Government
Monday February 12th, 8 pm
Speaker: J. D'Arcy

HATFIELD

County Library, Queensway
Monday February 26th, 8 pm
The New Left
Speaker: J. Carter

LETCHEWORTH

County Library, Broadway
Thursday February 8th, 8 pm.
Devaluation

GLASGOW

Sundays at the Woodside Public Hall
at 7.30 pm

February 4th
THE "BACK BRITAIN" FARCE
February 11th
A SOCIALIST VISITS AMERICA
February 18th
CAPITALISM: THE INSANE SOCIETY
February 25th
CAPITALISM AND WORLD HUNGER

Central London Indoor Meetings

The 1967-8 Winter series of meetings and lectures is being held at 2 Soho Square W1 (near Tottenham Court Road Tube Station) each Sunday evening until March 1968 at 7.00 prompt.

February 4th
HOW CAPITALISM RUNS THE GOVERNMENT

February 11th
THE YEAR OF THE GUERRILLA

February 18th
BLACK POWER

February 25th
SOVIET WRITERS AND ANTI-WRITERS

BRISTOL

Kingsley Hall, Old Market
Monday February 5th, 7.30 p.m.
Open Discussion
What is Socialism?

LETTER

Is Marxism Wrong?

Dear Sirs,
"The whole doctrine of Marxism rests on the materialist conception of history", says L. Laurat in *Marxism and Democracy*. You are no doubt aware of the renewed interest in theories of history and historicism (Isaiah Berlin: *Historical Invariability*; E. H. Carr: *What is History?*; G. R. Elton: *The Practice of History*, etc.).

You must also be aware of the fact that the Marxist conception of history and other forms of determinism have come in for a great deal of criticism—indeed they have been utterly discredited. The Marxist explanation of such events as the Reformation, the English Civil War, and the "scramble for Africa" are now recognised to be faulty if not demonstrably wrong.

In the light of later research and knowledge of history would you still reaffirm the materialist conception or would you concede that some modification is necessary?

T. YOUNG, *South Oxhey, Watford, Herts.*

REPLY

Mr. Young's conjectures about the present status of Marxism are shared, no doubt, by many who have taken a passing interest in historical inquiry. His remarks, however, tend to be so general that we feel it would lead to a more fruitful exchange if he would be more specific in his criticism. We therefore invite a supplementary letter from him.

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE